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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 2259
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 006442

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TAGS: PREL PGOV TH CH KN ASEAN

SUBJECT: CHINA ON THE THAI COUP, ASEAN AND NORTH KOREA

REF: BANGKOK 6095: CHINESE REACTION TO COUP

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Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton, Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. As part of Embassy Bangkok's regular tea meetings with the PRC Embassy, Chinese diplomats explained that China openly welcomed Thai interim PM Surayud Chulanont because the PRC holds "different standards" than the US. They confirmed that PRC Premier Wen Jiabao will meet with Surayud during the upcoming ASEAN-China meeting and that PLA Chief Liang Guanglie will see senior Thai military in Bangkok. They were curious whether President Bush planned to meet with Surayud during APEC and what it would mean to ASEAN-US relations if he didn't. End summary.

REALPOLITIK

¶2. (C) Chinese diplomats gave several reasons for Premier Wen Jiabao's letter that openly welcomed Thailand's junta-installed interim PM Surayud (Reftel A). After a mandatory recital explaining that "China does not interfere in another country's domestic affairs," Political Officer Zhang Ying explained that China essentially holds "different standards" than the US when looking at the coup. China did not believe that it should frown upon the coup d'etat since "it was bloodless and the Thai people welcomed it." Zhang asked "if the (Thai) people accepted it, why shouldn't the international community?" Jiang suggested that the Thai people's Buddhist philosophy of accepting fate enabled them to easily accept political contradictions like a "democratic coup." For example, she pointed to the ease with which the Thai were able to embrace Surayud despite his father's communist background. She added, "can you imagine a son of the KMT (Nationalist) becoming the head of China?" (Note: Surayud's father, a member of tQThai communists, lived out the end of his life in exile in Beijing. End note.)

THE "FIGURE" BEHIND THE GENERALS

¶3. (C) Jiang predicted that the September 19 coup would play out differently than previous coups. She contended that the

junta would not attempt to retain control of the country as they did in 1992 because this coup had a "figure behind the generals" (i.e. Privy Counselor Prem) who would ensure that the junta follows its timeline to restore a democratic government.

NO MIL-MIL MEETINGS?

¶4. (C) Initially, Political Officer Wang Shuai informed PolOffs that the PRC would distance itself from the Thai military and only meet with civilian officers within the interim government. However, Wang later admitted that Liang Guanglie, the Chief of General Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) will meet with General Boonsrang Niumpradit, Royal Thai Supreme Commander along with (retired) General Boonrawd Somthas, Interim Defense Minister when he visits Thailand as part of his "Goodwill Asia Tour."

EYE ON ASEAN

¶5. (C) Zhang confirmed that Wen Jiabao will meet Surayud at the ASEAN-China Commemorative Summit in Nanning, China at the end of October. She inquired if President Bush planned to meet with Surayud in Hanoi during APEC. Zhang wondered aloud what effects it may have on ASEAN-US relationship if the President refused to meet with Surayud.

"THEY DIDN'T LISTEN TO US"

¶6. (C) Separately, Jiang expressed frustration over the DPRK

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nuclear test. Shaking her head, she stated simply, "they didn't listen to us." Acknowledging that Beijing possesses "the only direct line" to Pyongyang, Jiang also agreed that the situation is precarious and China and South Korea would have "the most to lose" if it worsened.

COMMENT: OPPORTUNITY ARISEN

¶7. (C) China only sees the Thai coup as an opportunity to advance the Chinese position in Thailand. Taking advantage of American disapproval of the coup, the Chinese are quickly inserting themselves into this perceived schism by openly embracing the interim government and defending the coup's legitimacy. When asked what they would do if the junta resorted to violence as it did in 1992, the Chinese diplomats laughed and said that "we'd change our position then." End comment.

BOYCE